

From Participatory Policy Proposals to Local Policies: Explaining Diverse Trajectories

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Abstract: One of the aspects of participatory processes that has less often been the subject of systematic comparison is the fate of their outputs: their policy proposals. Even amongst those processes that are more policy-oriented the general impression is that they have only limited impact on final policies of public authorities. One of the possibilities is that politicians and officials cherry-pick from amongst the proposals emerging from these participatory processes, but we know very little about the factors that affect whether these proposals are accepted, rejected or transformed. Understanding what happens with this selection of policy proposals is particularly crucial if we want to analyse the failure and sustenance of participatory processes. The goal of the paper is twofold. First, we offer a theoretical model that aims to explain both the types of policies and the types of participatory processes that are more likely to be affected positively or negatively by cherry-picking. Second, we sketch a proposal on how to operationalize this model using a dataset of policy proposals emerging from a range of participatory processes developed in three Spanish regions.

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1. Introduction¹

What do we know about the extent to which proposals from participatory processes have had an impact on the decision making of political authorities? The evidence base is scant. As Baiocchi, Heller and Silva (2011: 1) recognise, this strand of research has suffered from at least two limitations: “It has been difficult to actually isolate the impact of participation and to determine how and why participation makes a difference”.

Where large-scale studies exist, they have tended to find relatively limited impact. In the UK, Lowndes and her colleagues discovered that ‘only one-third of local authorities felt that public participation had a significant outcome on final decision making’ (Lowndes *et al.* 2001: 452). Investigating user involvement in health and local authorities in the UK, Crawford and his colleagues could find very few examples of where citizen participation has actually led to improvements in services or changes in policy (Crawford *et al.* 2003). A similar scenario of infrequent and problematic relationships between participation through interactive policy-making and final decisions also appears in the Dutch case (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Tatenhove, Edelenbos and Klok, 2010).

It is through case studies of particularly celebrated cases where impact tends to be found. The case of Porto Alegre participatory budgeting is one such example where there is evidence of significant changes in the distribution of municipal budgetary resources (Baiocchi, 2005). However, even in this case, the clearest evidence points more to other kinds of results focused on civil society empowerment and new forms of more participatory policy styles (Baiocchi, Heller and Silva, 2011). While there are examples of the impact of participatory budgeting in other locations, some of the most rigorous comparative evidence points to less policy change (and other effects) than expected (Boulding and Wampler, 2009).

In an analysis of various mini-publics, Goodin and Dryzek (2006) found it extremely difficult to provide concrete examples of impact on decision-making beyond the oft-celebrated British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly (BCCA). A similar picture emerges from Danish consensus conferences (Klüver 1995; Joss 1998), deliberative polls (Lehr *et al.* 2003 quoted in Goodin and Dryzek 2006), Swiss participatory planning (Koch, 2013) or Spanish citizen juries (Font and Blanco, 2007). In sum, while there are a small number of exemplary examples of individual cases where policy effects are clear and unambiguous, attempts to provide a more inclusive analysis across the field suggest limited and unsystematic effects (Mazeaud *et al.*, 2012). We are left with the general impression that we are a long way short of participation fulfilling its promise of policy transformation.

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Why is this the case? What do we know about the reasons why many proposals never materialize as policies? Our aim is to help fill the gap in knowledge of the factors that help explain this lack of effect and its variation across different contexts. Thus, our theoretical contribution has two main goals. First, we discuss the relationship between proposals and policy outcomes, identifying the different potential fates of proposals in the policy process and, as a result, defining the dependent variables to be used in our research (section 2). Second, we review a number of the potential explanations of the fate of proposals: factors that may account for why some proposals are more successful than others. Through the discussion of these factors we present our independent variables (section 3). Section 4 develops a research strategy and an operationalization proposal to test this model and presents early findings based on the ongoing fieldwork. Section 5 concludes with a final discussion of the implications of these preliminary results.

2. The proposal to policy process² (and our dependent variables)

Many ideas and proposals come out of a participatory event, but only a few are ever formally approved by the sponsoring authority. This set of approved proposals is the starting point of our journey. Such proposals may be extraordinarily diverse, in different aspects like the degree of specificity of the proposals (from paving a section of a road to the promotion of social justice), the number (from one to hundreds coming out from a single process) or the formality of the procedure of proposal approval within the event (from voting to simply collecting within the minutes of the meeting all the ideas that have been formulated). This diversity by itself may be reason to comprehend their different fate: it is easy to understand that a single proposal supported by an overwhelming majority of the members of a community in a ballot has a much higher likelihood of being adopted than one of seventy ideas that emerged from a two hour meeting involving twenty participants.

However, there are many steps that need to be considered between the emergence of a set of proposals from a participatory event and the hoped for societal transformation. Figure 1 shows some of the possible trajectories that these proposals can follow. As the figure indicates, only one of the possible trajectories ends up producing social change. This paper concentrates on the left part of the figure – in other words, we will not discuss the many reasons why policy outputs may not result in certain policy outcomes, but the reasons why particular policy proposals are adopted by public authorities, whereas others are not.³

(Figure 1 about here)

² We are aware that policy formulation is really a much more complicated process in constant redefinition. However, for the sake of simplicity (which is relatively realistic in the case of many of the specific policy proposals that come out from local participation processes) we will consider each policy decision as if they were independent and clearly distinguishable realities. Also, since our approach is based on proposals, it will mostly deal with the formulation or decision phases of public policies, even if in some cases these proposals may also appear during diagnosis or evaluation phases.

³ For a discussion of the factors in the right part of Figure 1 applied to participatory budgeting, see Boulding and Wampler (2009).

Many participatory processes end up in a dead end once the participatory momentum finishes and participants go back home. This is the case, for example, with many of the citizens' juries organised by Spanish local government, where lack of involvement (and thus oversight) of local associations and disinterest on the part of local media and opposition parties have often resulted in silence and lack of action by local authorities (Font and Blanco, 2007). In most of these cases, there are no obvious distinctions in terms of the types of proposals coming out from the processes; it is the whole package that is forgotten.

In other cases, some of the proposals end up converted into policies, whereas others are either explicitly rejected or simply abandoned, for reasons including those listed in Figure 1: the proposal openly contradicts previous decisions of the municipality; technical problems appear when the details are examined; or, simply, since the process had ended in a long list of proposals, the local government chooses only a few of them (Font, 2003: 139)⁴. In sum, whereas some participatory processes employ what Baocicchi and Ganuza (2014: 36) have called an "exclusive conveyor belt", with minimum veto points where citizen proposals can be changed, others offer extensive scope for these changes to happen.

There is a tendency to assume that a policy proposal has a dichotomous fate: adopted or not. However, the reality is likely to be more complicated. We consider a scale (from low to high) of potential evidences of adoption:

1. Rejected/ignored
2. Only formal acceptance of proposal
3. Appears in department's policy documentation
4. Appears in department's programme of work
5. Implementing (in process)
6. Full implementation

Secondly, many proposals are likely to suffer significant changes during the process of adoption by public authorities. Occasionally, policy proposals from a participatory process may take a quite detailed form that leaves little discretion when it comes to adoption. However, most proposals are likely to be less detailed, such that their final adoption leaves plenty of room for incorporating changes that significantly alter the intentions of the proposal or allow for partial adoption. To capture this possibility we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether the proposal has suffered significant changes during its implementation process.

⁴ Participatory budgets would tend to be exceptions to this rule. For example, the detailed analysis of the proposals from the Seville participatory budgeting process during the 2005-2009 period exemplifies these different trajectories: according to an external evaluation (Barragán et al, 2011) between 75% and 80% of the approximately 14,000 proposals had been executed in the years following their approval; 3% of the proposals were rejected because either they were technically inappropriate or the local administration was not in charge of this policy; 2% were not incorporated as such into the official local budget, because they were already planned and as such, somehow incorporated into the budget; and another 15% belonged to a group called "suggestions" since they were general ideas that could not be translated into a specific policy with its own budget.

Third, adoption is not the only way for a policy proposal to be successful. Agenda-setting has long been recognised as a powerful way to influence policy-making and societal outcomes⁵ and transparency is often recognised an important good of participatory institutions (Smith, 2009). As a result, we incorporate another dichotomous variable capturing whether there has been a public explanation of why a proposal has been rejected or substantially modified⁶.

In sum, all the processes described up to this point are ones where many policy proposals reach the local administration desk, but only a certain amount of them evolve into actual policies. Is there any logic in this selection process? Do politicians cherry-pick (Smith, 2001; 2009: 93) among the processes or among the proposals? In cases where they do, is there an obvious explanatory logic? The next section will discuss the factors that can facilitate or diminish the likelihood that a given policy proposal will end up becoming a policy finally adopted by the municipality.

3. Explanatory factors and independent variables

The previous discussion has given some clues about the types of factors that may shape the fate of a policy proposal from a participatory process. We can distinguish two basic types of explanations: contextual and policy-related. Contextual explanations are those that have an effect on any proposal that emerges from a given participatory process, i.e. those explanations that would affect equally the sixteen proposals coming out from the Terrasa participatory budget of 2010. Such explanations could relate to the characteristics of the municipality (e.g., extremely constrained budget, local government extremely supportive to any participatory proposal) or to the characteristics of the specific participatory devices (e.g. highly visible or legally binding). In comparison, policy related explanations are those that are specific to each of the policy proposals, including factors such as their cost or the degree of social polarization that the proposal creates⁷. The variables associated with the explanatory factors are laid out in detail in the Appendix.

a. Contextual factors

The first group of contextual factors relates to characteristics of the municipality. Among these we find the broader organisational culture of the institution and the way that this embeds a

⁵ For example, there is plenty of evidence from Switzerland that unsuccessful initiatives have led to reactions from within the political elite. Further, Gamson's (1990) typology of protest outcomes includes recognition and voice as an important outcome that protest group may achieve. Policy proposals can be (at least partially) successful though recognition without being finally implemented. For example, the Citizens Assemblies' proposals of electoral reform in Canada and the Netherlands never converted into effective policies, but they received quite clear recognition from public administrations (Fournier et al, 2011).

⁶ In some cases a requirement for public explanation by public authorities is designed into participatory processes. In Germany, most planning cells developed the practice of drawing up a contract between the commissioning body, the organisers and the participants of planning cells, requiring the former to explain within a certain time frame how it has responded to the recommendations of the citizens' report. Such contracts were developed to lessen the possibility that public authorities respond selectively (cherry-pick) to proposals.

⁷ A similar approach using both contextual and proposal related variables to explain their final outcomes appears in Labone and Chase (2009).

commitment to participation. Cooper and Smith (2012) offer the example of health authorities in the UK that have been in the vanguard of engaging the public. They found that more than one practitioner warmly recounts the pleasure of working with the Department of Health, which is contrasted with a far less sympathetic attitude in the German case. In organizations with a less developed participation culture the public is too often viewed negatively as ‘passive consumers; as a naïve, childlike and clamorous public; and/or as lacking skills, capacities or trust’ (Newman et al 2004: 210). Our proxies to capture organisational culture are the number of participatory processes employed during the previous years, the existence of a participation unit or department and the existence of a participation plan⁸.

Another potentially important factor is the timing of the participatory process. Cooper and Smith highlight the impact of political change on the fate of proposals, in particular the effect of the electoral cycle: a change in political leadership means that public participation organized under a previous regime is often viewed with suspicion and generally ignored. While new elections that result in changes in government can be a threat for on-going participatory processes, this risk becomes even greater when the attitude of the different parties towards the process has been confrontational. For example, in their analysis of outcomes of Spanish citizens’ juries, Font and Blanco (2007) provide evidence that in the two cases where the proposals were completely abandoned, not only was there a change in government, but also the opposition had overtly boycotted the participatory process from the very beginning⁹. We aim to capture the influence of timing through the proximity to elections and whether these elections resulted in a different government.

We have reasonably strong evidence that the ideology of governing parties can have an influence on the embedding of participatory processes. The most commonly cited example is from Brazil, where the emergence and sustenance of participatory budgeting has been strongly tied to the fate of the Left-wing Workers Party (PT) (Baiocchi 2005)¹⁰. However, this previous research tends to focus on the *creation* of participatory spaces: whether that apparent ideological bias affects the *uptake* and *selection* of proposals from participatory processes (our research question) is very much open to question, but we will consider the ideology of the mayor’s party and the government stability/strength as potentially important variables.

Another important contextual factor will be the availability of resources, mostly economic ones. The successful story of Porto Alegre’s participatory budget and its distinctiveness from other Brazilian cases has often been attributed to the availability of funding: the city was wealthier than others and the process started with a significant tax rise that provided additional resources (Baiocchi, 2005). More recently, Boulding and Wampler (2009) have explained the limited effects

⁸ See the Appendix for the operationalization of all independent variables.

⁹ More generally, the idea that time matters has appeared elsewhere, indicating that the timing of the participatory process in the policy cycle can be highly influential in its final results (Barrett et al, 2012; Weiksner et al, 2012)

¹⁰ There is a general tendency to view participation as a left-of-centre practice, although this may relate to particular types of participation. Certainly in the UK, new public management (very much a creation of the Right) has led to increased public participation in relation to quality of service delivery. Even for Participatory Budgeting, Baiocchi and Ganuza (2014) make clear that the most recent wave of diffusion has clearly gone beyond ideological boundaries.

of participatory budgeting in other cities by pointing precisely to the limited funds that many of them had available for these programs. Income per capita and the existence of external funding are the variables capturing the potential explanatory role of resources.

A final consideration relates to the general claim within democratic theory that size matters: that participation is easier to organise and is more effective at smaller scales (Dahl 1998: 110). Whether such integration leads to increased adoption and less cherry-picking remains an open question, but we might well expect that the size of population of a municipality more easily enables popular control over the fate of proposals.

The second set of important contextual variables in explaining outcomes, relates to the design of the participatory process. Several aspects of this design may be strongly influential. The first is the relationship between the participatory process and formal decision-making. Fung (2006) distinguishes between 5 categories of potential influence, from those processes that have direct authority to those where the citizens' role is purely symbolic since their link to policy-making is not established. For example, a series of deliberative experiments funded by the European Commission following the failure to agree a new constitution were not integrated into any specific decision process (Smith 2013). A similar scenario appears in many of the processes that are mostly developed for academic research and where public authorities have often no direct linkage to the process¹¹. At the other end of the spectrum are a limited number of processes where direct effect is built into the design: the public authority has accepted that whatever proposal emerges from the process will be implemented. Examples include Swiss popular initiatives (Papadopoulos, 1998), variants of participatory budgeting (Baiocchi et al , 2011) or municipalities that are governed through a New England town meeting (Bryan, 2003). We draw on four variables to capture the possible link between process design and policy-making: the policy stage(s) (from diagnosis to evaluation) in which the participatory process is integrated; whether it cuts across more than one stage; the type of process design (including whether temporary or permanent); and whether the local authority is required to respond.

Another process related factor that is likely to have an effect is whether the process is the exclusive result of political will of the authority or whether this has been constrained (or potentially enabled) by external forces. One aspect of this is the extent to which the local administration is organising participatory processes as a matter of choice or in cooperation with other agents. For example, if the pressure to organise the process comes from civil society, a reluctant government would have organised an engagement process, but may well later ignore its proposals. However it is also likely that if civil society has the power to affect the establishment of a participatory process, it will also have sufficient influence to at least pressurise the authority to provide some response to the proposals. The empirical results of Font and Galais (2011) offer evidence that those processes that have been jointly organised by authorities and

¹¹ This is the case of many Deliberative Opinion Polls or of other participatory experiments developed mostly with academic goals (e.g., Cuesta et al, 2008; Grönlund, Setälä and Herne, 2010). In this paper we are assuming that proposals coming out from participatory processes have decision-makers as their final audience, but in the case of Deliberative Opinion Polls (Fishkin, 1995) connected to referenda or in other processes like the Oregon Citizen's initiative review (Gastil and Knobloch, 2011), the messages are addressed to the general electorate.

civil society tend to be, at the very least, more connected to the policy making process¹². We will collect data on which organizations have initiated the process and whether there is any external financed support.

The visibility of a participatory process can also increase its policy impact. Even those referenda that are legally consultative in character often end up being more influential than many other participatory processes (Papadopoulos, 1998). Their high visibility and the legitimacy that rules and rituals similar to those of electoral processes invest (e.g., universal suffrage or secret vote), are likely to have an influence. The more public and well-known the process, the more difficult it is to ignore its policy recommendations. Our data set includes five variables capturing the visibility of the participatory process:¹³ whether the public authority has actively promoted the process; discussion of the process in the media; discussion of policy proposals in the media; the temporal character of the process; and the number of years it has been organized.

There is a growing literature that suggests that the different goods or virtues a participatory process embodies are likely to have an effect on its reception. Both theoretically and empirically it is difficult (if not impossible) for any process to simultaneously maximise all the desired qualities we associate with democratic institutions (Fung, 2006; Font and Galais, 2011; Smith 2009). One particular distinction often drawn is the trade-offs between deliberative and participatory goals (Mutz, 2006; Pateman 2012). Similarly Gilman (2013), exploring the case of the New York participatory budgeting, shows that whereas some neighbourhood groups are better at deliberation at the expense of efficiency, others are more goal-oriented (at the expense of deliberation) and tend to produce outcomes that move easier into policy-making. Our proxies for the deliberative characteristics of participatory processes are: the number of participants; facilitation; presence of experts; and level of information provision.

This result may be related to a final aspect of the process design: the types of participants. The claim that many associations make, and some academic work supports (Barnes et al, 2007)¹⁴, is that associational participation is often avoided by politicians precisely because it produces more controversial proposals. In summarising a couple of exemplary cases of policy impact, Barrett et

¹² We do not understand the specific mechanism that links this role of civil society with potential larger influence on policy, but one possibility is that when a government is not the single actor organising a participatory process, there is more pressure to take the process and outcomes seriously; to be transparent about goals and objectives of the project. If this is the case, this co-operation effect could extend beyond civil society and appear in any process jointly organized by political actors.

¹³ There are at least two relevant factors here. First, the extent of media diffusion on the part of public authorities: those bodies that have been more active in raising the profile of participation exercises (through, for example, press releases, press conferences, social media activity, etc.) are arguably likely to be more committed to considering and responding to proposals. Second, the degree of media publicity achieved: the amount of reporting that actually appears in various media outlets is again likely to affect the orientation of public bodies towards proposals. Visibility could also be related to the type of participatory process, for example, whether the participatory process is on-going or one-off. As the citizens' jury examples suggest, one-off exercises may be easier to ignore (except if well publicised) compared to those, such as participatory budgeting, which provide opportunities for citizens and/or civil society organisations to return to issues on a regular cycle of engagement.

¹⁴ They claim that those processes that engage publics 'that have their roots in voluntary organisations, grass-roots bodies or some form of social agency' are more likely to resist bureaucratic norms.

al highlight that the strong impact on policy around public funding on children's welfare that emerged from the Keiki Caucus in the Hawaii state legislature occurred where 'the majority of the non-legislative participants came from professional civil society organizations rather than the public at large' (2012: 189). In consequence, we use two different variables to capture the types of participants in the participatory process: associational presence; and (where present) the mode of selection of citizens.

b. Policy related factors

The second set of potentially important factors differentiates between proposals that have been produced in the same context (municipality and participatory process). The emphasis of most of the research mentioned in the previous section on the relevance of contextual factors (including process design) overlooks the fact that the same processes often produce many proposals which have different fates: some are ignored whereas others become policy. Which are the factors that help to explain these different outcomes? Previous research has pointed to at least two major sets of factors: the substantive content of the proposals and the degree of support for the proposal.

The first obvious factor is the nature of proposals. One reason why a significant number of proposals are not given serious consideration is because they are highly generic in character (e.g. the public authority should promote social justice / environmental sustainability / etc.): vague recommendations, value statements and/or aggregation of opinions too general to offer useful guidance for policy makers. Again, many of the participatory processes sponsored at the European level in the mid-2000s had just such outputs – a further explanation for their lack of impact (Smith 2013). We aim to distinguish between implementable and generic proposals and provide some detail of the nature of the policy proposal.

For those proposals that are more focused, we can distinguish a continuum related to the degree to which proposals challenge existing policy: from proposals that do not question existing policy positions, those that recommend marginal changes, through to proposals that bring into question existing policies and practices. There is a strong sceptical literature on public participation that suggests that processes tend to be nothing more than forms of co-optation: proposals will be ignored or the design and results of participation will be manipulated by political authorities to suit their own interests (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Fiorino 1990: 230-31). Such a sceptical perspective does not entail that all proposals will be ignored by public authorities; rather only those that reinforce existing prejudices of the body in question will be adopted. In collecting data on the extent to which a policy proposal represents continuity or challenge, we must also consider how this factor interacts with others: in a context of government change, the emergence of proposals that support the desired change of direction are likely to be publicly supported by authorities¹⁵.

¹⁵ One example is Porto Alegre participatory budgeting, where the main objective was to facilitate re-distributional policies that fulfilled the PT's objective of institutionalising social justice (Baiocchi, 2005). Barnes et al (2007) also

Another aspect of the substantive content of proposals that may be crucial to explain their fate is that they do not necessarily respect the boundaries of political competence within and between public authorities. Proposals may emerge on issues where the sponsoring body does not have competence to respond or affect the policies and practices of departments that had no interest in the consultation exercise (Cooper and Smith 2012: 27)¹⁶. As such we are collecting data on the subject of the proposal; the extent to which the municipality has competence in that field; and the number of departments potentially affected by the proposal.

The second broad type of policy-related factors is the degree of support for each proposal. This raises the question as to which kind of support is more important? At least three may have a potential role. The first is the degree of support among participants themselves. In many cases, this is unknown since final reports may not include votes or other measures of support. However, when these data are known and even more when they are publicly available, they may have an influence¹⁷.

The second type of support comes from outside the participatory process. The proposals of participatory processes are rarely, if ever, the only input into the policy process. Proposals are likely to have more chance of acceptance if other stakeholders are offering similar recommendations or if there is some other form of social pressure (Hendriks 2005). We will collect data on both the extent and source of external support and/or opposition.

Finally, support within the public authority may be especially crucial. The attitude of the public authority should not be considered as a single entity with a single interest, but rather we need to recognise the competing rationalities and interests that make up any institution. The fate of proposals from participation processes is thus related to their position within this constellation of rationalities and interests. This is especially clear in the case of coalition governments, where the mayor and the councillor that leads the participatory process may be from different parties, as Ganuza and Francés (2012) show for the Córdoba participatory budget. These different positions towards every policy proposal can equally appear among factions or persons of the same party and between politicians and bureaucrats within the same department. We use four variables to attempt to capture the degree of support within the public authority: agreement amongst

provide an example of where a public official drew on participatory processes to legitimate her argument for policy reform within the public authority: the alignment of the proposals with the views of a reform-minded champion within the public authority led to their further consideration.

¹⁶ Similarly Crawford and colleagues highlight the way in which national policy can limit the impact of proposals: ‘Implementing changes that require reallocation of resources becomes more difficult, especially if these conflict with nationally defined service priorities’ (Crawford et al 2003).

¹⁷ This is especially clear in the case of referenda. Would it have been so easy to force the repetition of the Irish referenda on the Treaty of Nice (2001) and the Treaty of Lisbon (2008) if the No vote would have been 65% instead of 53% (with limited turnout) achieved in both cases? The example of the French and Dutch referenda on the EU Constitution and their effect on EU politics with their 55% (with high turnout) and 61.5% of rejections respectively suggests that clear majorities are more difficult to be ignored.

politicians; agreement amongst civil servants; support in party platforms; and necessary budget for implementation.

Table 1 summarizes the main explanatory factors developed through this section and the Appendix provides details of the variables for which we will be collecting data. Section 4 discusses the operationalization and methodological choices we face in collecting data for a set of actual participatory processes.

Table 1 about here

4. From theory to operationalization

This section takes a first step towards an operationalization strategy to test the ideas developed in the previous sections. To test the explanatory power of the variables has a significant effect on our choice of cases: we need variation at the three levels that appear in Table 1: polity, process and policy. This is especially important, since most of the literature mentioned in the previous section tends to show variation at only one of the levels, examining sets of policy proposals emerging from a small set of fairly homogeneous participatory processes (Barrett, Wyman and Schattan, 2012, Fournier et al, 2011; Olken, 2010).

Simultaneously, we want to have a controlled amount of contextual variation, since extremely diverse levels of socioeconomic development and very large differences in political and administration rules and routines could create too challenging a scenario where alternative explanations would be impossible to control. Trying to balance these two concerns, our choice has been to limit our selection to a single polity having a constant legal scenario (Spain) and to introduce contextual variation through the selection of diverse municipalities and regions. Since a fully representative frame of participatory process does not exist and our goal is more to ensure diversity, our initial sampling frame is a quite diverse collection of participatory processes developed in three Spanish regions (Andalucía, Catalonia and Madrid)¹⁸.

We have selected a specific time frame, from one local election (2007) to the next (2011), trying to combine the possibility that there has been time enough for at least the initial implementation of these proposals, but also that memories and administrative records are recent enough to be tracked. Since our goal is to analyse what happens to policy proposals we focus only on those participatory processes that produce some kind of recommendation that is specific enough so that it becomes possible to follow whether it has been adopted¹⁹. Thus, **the universe for our**

¹⁸ The details of the data collection process appear in Galais et al (2012) or in Font, Della Porta and Sintomer (2014). The three regions selected introduce substantial contextual variation since they include quite different levels of development as well as very different regional participation policies (Sintomer and Del Pino, 2014).

¹⁹ We will consider the following definition of policy proposal for the final selection of cases: “A participatory process has policy proposals when specific recommendations are made. They should be made in a way that they can be audited and falsified and imply a specific action or strategy. Thus, a very general recommendation/social goal like “Develop a

study is participatory processes developed by municipalities in these three regions during the period 2007-2011²⁰ that end up in specific policy proposals.

Our final unit of analysis will be policy proposals. Since it is quite likely that different policy proposals emerging from the same participatory process are treated differently by local governments, we need to follow the evolution of each (or a sample) of them to see whether there are factors systematically associated with the fate of different policy proposals.

4.1. Choosing participatory processes

We have two different databases as starting points. On the one hand, we have a database for Andalusia, Madrid and Catalonia collected by web content mining (N = 292). On the other hand, extra information was collected for Andalusia with a double survey strategy: an on-line questionnaire addressed to municipalities (CASI) and a follow-up (CATI) for those municipalities that had not answered our first online approach (N = 517). The most important difference for us was that data mining produced a possible more reliable picture of the processes and their achievements, but also where processes developed in large cities were largely over-represented. We will use processes from both of these databases for the final case selection²¹.

We aim to achieve a good representation of diverse types of participatory processes. We cannot make claims that we perfectly represent reality (the universe from which we start is not a representative sample), but that we analyze policy proposals in a quite varied setting of populations and processes. The first step is to undertake some depuration operations in order to adjust our initial databases to the criteria set out above²². Then, we used stratified sampling, to ensure a representation of potentially important independent variables through the different strata. To guarantee representation of crucial independent variables, we have selected three variables to create the strata for case selection:

1. Region/database is the first stratum: 10 processes from each of them²³.
2. Process design: we create a new variable with these categories:
 - a) Participatory budgeting
 - b) Strategic planning (agenda 21, education, economy, participatory structures,..)
 - c) Other permanent mechanisms
 - d) Other temporary processes

more egalitarian city” would not be considered, it is too unspecific and there are many possible policies that could be enacted under this ambition”.

²⁰ When checking information about permanent mechanisms (i.e. participatory budgeting) we will select proposals related to the 2010 cycle or the last cycle that ended before that time.

²¹ In this paper we provide sample selection details using only the comparative 3 region database. A similar selection procedure will be used to select the 10 cases coming out of the Andalusía survey.

²² For example, elimination of processes not ending in specific policy proposals or which are clearly out of the temporal or territorial scope defined above.

²³ This ensures 10 cases from each of the three regions with a similar data collection process plus an additional 10 Andalusía cases from small municipalities (survey database).

3. As a proxy for organizational culture (but also to see whether the same municipality has a similar approach to different processes) we use number of participatory experiences enacted by the municipality. In each region we include two municipalities with three or more processes (high organizational culture), taking three processes for each of them²⁴. The remaining four cases will come from the low organizational culture category (one/two experiences).

Whenever choice is possible²⁵, the final selection of municipalities will be done through random selection²⁶. Table 2 shows the distribution of process types in our initial three region sampling frame and among the cases selected after applying these criteria.

Table 2 about here

4.2. Selecting and coding policy proposals

The first step of the coding of proposals will be to establish the list of policy proposals resulting from each participatory process. In some cases this list will be readily available; in others it will require a careful reconstruction (see section 5); and for others still, it will not exist. In this final situation we will substitute the case since, lacking a list of proposals, our research questions cannot be tested.

The number of policy proposals from these processes is extremely diverse. An initial exploration using the information available on the local web sites shows variation ranging from a couple of proposals to hundreds (see section 5). Since we want as much proposal variation as possible (relative to available limited resources), we code each policy proposal when there are no more than 20 from a single process and select randomly 20 when the number is larger. Following the same logic of the previous section, whenever these proposals appear in a stratified format (e.g., by thematic issue packages as is often the case in Agenda 21 processes), we will choose (randomly) proposals from each of the strata.

We need to capture quite diverse data, particularly for the independent variables, where we will need information from three different levels of analysis: municipality, participatory process and policy proposal. Much of the information on the first two levels is already available in the already-existing database that we used as the sampling frame or in other publically available sources (e.g.

²⁴ Since in Catalonia we have only two municipalities with three or more experiences, for this region we include three municipalities with two experiences each.

²⁵ The Madrid case (and practically also the Catalan cases) offer no choice between processes: the number of actual processes in some of the strata is the same as the number we require.

²⁶ We will substitute a participatory process when it becomes clear that we will not have enough cooperation to collect most of the information we are interested in. This is different from cases where we will have a lot of missing information, particularly where it is impossible to determine the final impact of the proposals. If the municipality itself cannot establish whether a proposal has been implemented we will consider that case. If lack of information is because of lack of cooperation on the part of the public authority and there is no other way of generating data, we will (reluctantly) move to the substitute case (random selection in the same or most similar strata).

municipal budget information, electoral results). Our objective is to create a database where each policy proposal is a case, with 15 variables at the municipality level (e.g., population, budget, party of the mayor), about 20 variables at the process level (from issues covered to types of participants) and about 15 variables on the policy proposal itself and its outcomes.

To complete the coding the next step is to get as much information as possible through the municipal web pages, where we have found extremely diverse levels of information. Following this step, we will make an initial contact with the municipality, trying to obtain as many official documents and records that could provide relevant written official details. The third more costly step will be to proceed with interviews, starting with employees of the local administration and continuing with other informants from civil society or the local political world. The reliability of the answers will be measured according to the source(s) (i.e., official records, idea appearing in more than one interview, idea appearing in just one interview). Graph 1 captures the most important steps in of this research design.

Graph 1 about here

A team of four PhD candidates will participate in the data collection process, which is expected to last five months. Once we have finished the fieldwork in approximately 25% of the cases we will proceed to code the answers for those cases. This initial coding will be undertaken independently by two coders to check the coding reliability. In addition to the fieldwork forms that capture the information to be coded we will keep a fieldwork journal record for each municipality to register all contacts, sources, problems or operational decisions.

5. Preliminary findings

Most of the fieldwork will be undertaken over the next few months. However, piloting of the data collection process has generated issues that require consideration and that, overall, offer plausibility to the idea of cherry-picking.

First, scope for cherry-picking (i.e., for accepting some of the proposals but not all of them) certainly exists for most participatory processes. Referenda with a clear, single and straightforward outcome seem to be a clear exception. Most have a significant number of policy proposals; only very few have one or even a very limited number of proposals. Table 3 shows the number of proposals that appear in a preliminary search of the full universe of 249 participatory processes. For our current purposes we are only interested in how many have more than 25 proposals: these are the large majority of the processes that had precise proposals. Several had more than 100 or even 200 proposals. In some of these cases, the proposals are organized and coherent list of ideas where the logic is that all of them should be implemented as a full policy package. In others, the list of proposals is closer to a wish list that includes all sorts of independent ideas from which cherry-picking a few is a real possibility.

Table 3 about here

Second, in a substantial number of the processes there may be room for different cherry-picking strategies. Della Porta, Reiter and Alarcón (2014) have shown that many Southern European participatory processes combine different consultation procedures. Sometimes, these different tools are used sequentially so that each of them will incorporate the previous citizen inputs. However, in other cases, these consultation methodologies will run in parallel, often because they aim to capture the proposals of different sectors. Whereas in the first case a final list of proposals should not be problematic, in the second the existence of this list may be more the result of a technical integration exercise undertaken by the municipality than a direct result of the participatory process itself²⁷. This situation has emerged in at least a couple of cases in our sample raising the question of which list of proposals should be used.

For, example, the municipality of Córdoba organized a participatory process to write its participation plan. The process developed over a couple of years and included several different mechanisms to generate opinions from the municipality's departments, citizens and associations. In November 2009 a document titled "Results of the participatory process" was produced. The document is not a full and final list of proposals, but diverse results of the different types of consultations organized: 11 pages include ideas and specific proposals from the municipality's departments, 2 pages on diagnosis and proposals from already-existing participatory institutions, 3 pages are the conclusions of a deliberative forum where 30 participants selected at random participated (this includes specific proposals) and 3 pages are the result of a day meeting where 380 people (including municipality's personnel, but probably the majority members of local associations) participated. On 14 November 2009, an open accountability session took place, where all these process and proposals were considered. It appears that no conclusions or proposals emerged from this final plenary session. A few months later the municipality presented the Participation Plan – the official result of all the overall process – which includes 95 specific proposals. The plan was approved by the local council, but not by any participatory body involved in the process.

This case (and other similar ones) raises an important operational question – which is the proposal list we should use? – and generates interesting preliminary evidence. Since our main goal is to focus primarily on 'political' variables that shape the logic of cherry-picking, we will use the official participation plan as our list of policy proposals. At the same time, this case gives some sense of the room for maneuver to cherry-pick that exists since we do not know the (presumably technical) criteria used to move from the four partial reports to the final one. A small qualitative case study trying to reconstruct how the final list was built will be undertaken for this and other similar cases to explore whether there is any systematic technical or political factors that explain cherry-picking at these earlier stages.

²⁷ See Koch (2013) for a similar argument about how technical cherry-picking plays a decisive role.

Finally, the extent of information that municipalities hold on the follow-up to proposals is likely to be quite varied. Even if we have a final sample as diverse and representative as possible, it will probably be biased, with the best organized processes over-represented: poor processes will drop from the list because they are more likely not to have a final list of proposals, not to be publicized on the web or lack cooperation with public authorities, with the result that substitution is necessary. Additionally, our capacity to follow proposals will vary. Initial findings from two pilot municipalities indicates an apparently remarkable level of follow-up: for example for the Strategic Plan of Alcaudete, 50% of proposals executed; 10% partially executed; 5% being planned; and 35% not executed. However, these are unofficial responses from municipality sources that are yet to be confirmed through fieldwork and/or official documents.

6. Final remarks

Producing different (better?) policies is one of the important alleged goals of many participatory processes. However, to achieve these policy consequences, the first necessary step is that policy proposals resulting from participatory processes effectively evolve into actual policies. The degree to which this happens in reality has been the object of scant attention, especially if we move beyond individual case studies or research focusing in a single type of participatory process. Our goal in this paper has been to present an on-going project that addresses this gap.

In the first part of the paper we have identified some of the reasons that explain why policy proposals fail to evolve into actual policies and have discussed what policy adoption means. Next, we have developed a list of potential explanations of why some participatory processes and some specific proposals are more likely to be adopted than others. The exploratory character of the research has meant that rather than specifying a limited set of strong hypotheses, we have chosen to develop a comprehensive list of potentially important variables, whose final effects are clearer in some cases but not in others. The final part of the paper has sketched the next steps needed to operationalize such a project in a specific empirical setting (local participatory processes developed by municipalities of three Spanish regions during 2007-2011) and pointed to a few issues that have emerged from the initial steps of the data collection process.

The steps ahead entail a number of difficulties, from gaining cooperation from municipalities and/or establishing what is sufficient evidence of a proposal being adopted. The different goals of the project will end up being more or less important depending on the amount and quality of the data that we will be able to collect. This paper has suggested the usage of a quantitative explanatory logic that could be applied in an optimistic scenario, where most of the information we aim to capture will be really available. However, in a field where we lack clear evidence beyond a few case studies, to provide a significant description of a more plural reality will be a crucial step in itself. From knowledge about the lists of proposals produced in participatory processes (How they are produced? How many are generated? What type of content do they represent?), to how these lists are handled and dealt with in municipalities (and in the public sphere), our hope is that the research can make a significant contribution to the development of more systematic comparative analysis within the field of participatory democracy.

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Table 1. The explanatory factors of policy proposals' success

Contextual factors	Context/ polity factors	Organisational culture
		Timing (electoral cycle and others)
		Ideology
		Resources available
		Size of municipality
	Process design	Link to policy making
		Organised under pressure/in co-operation
		Visibility
		Participation or deliberation oriented
		Type of participants
Policy related factors	Content of proposals	Generic or specific
		Challenging or not challenging
		Boundaries of political competence
	Degree of support	In the participation process
		In society/stakeholders
		In local institution

Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Types of participatory processes in the three region sampling frame and among cases selected

	Universe		Selected cases	
	n	%	n	%
Participatory budgeting	26	12,1	6	20,0
Strategic planning	101	47,2	8	26,7
Other permanent mechanism	50	23,4	10	33,3
Other temporary experiences	36	16,8	6	20,0
DK/NA	1	,5	-	-
Total	214	100,0	30	100,0

Source: Cherry-picking 3 region database

Table 3. Policy proposals from 249 participatory processes

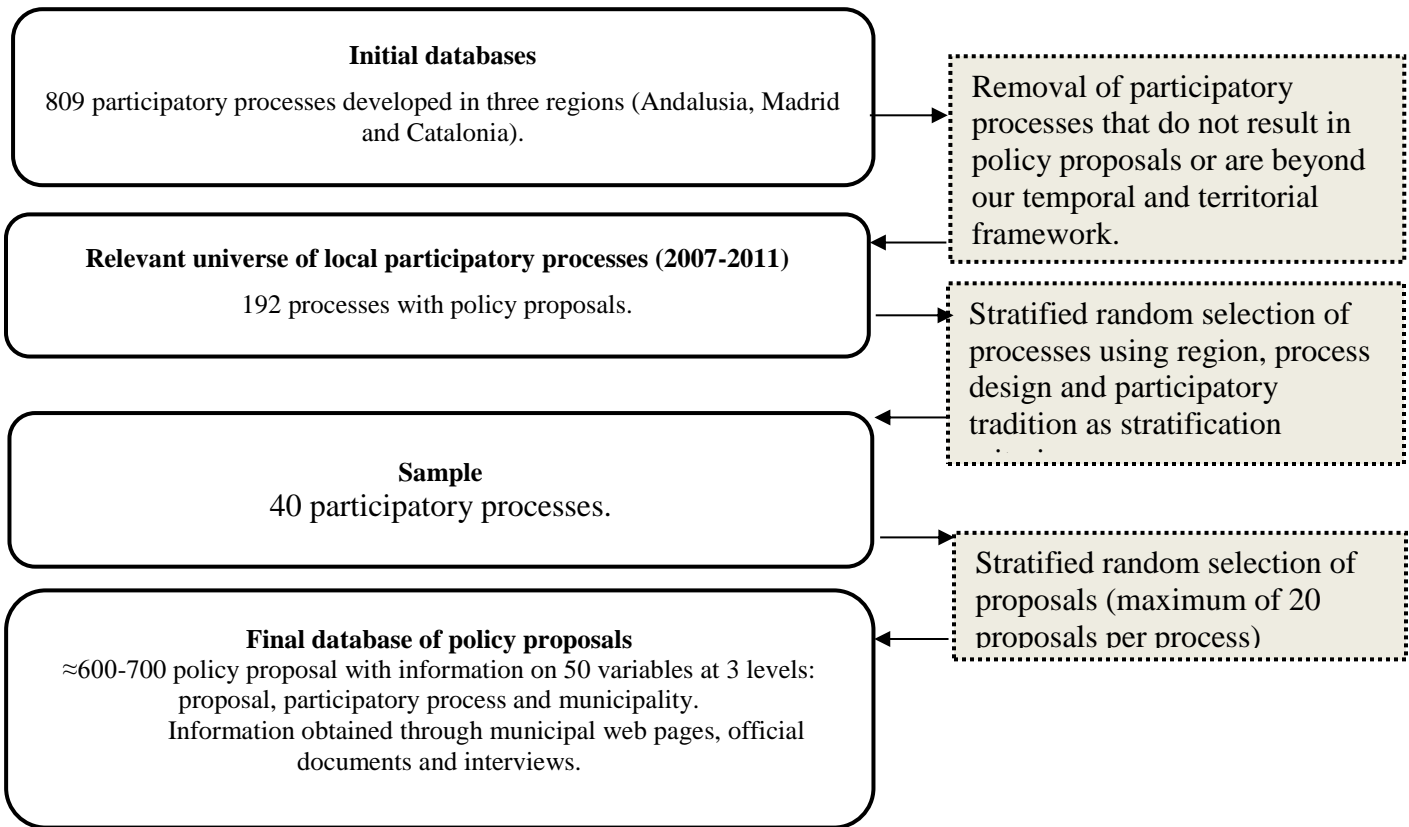
CHERRY-PICKING'S DATABASE					
Experiences without proposals		Experiences with proposals		Experiences without info about proposals	
23	9%	192	77%	34	14%



Number of experiences according to the potential implementation		
All implementable	68	35%
A majority implementable	14	7%
Both	3	2%
A majority generic	2	1%
All generic	5	3%
Not enough information to permit proposal	100	52%

Number of proposals per experience (excluding no info)		
1-5 proposals	14	16%
6-10 proposals	9	11%
11-15 proposals	10	12%
16-20 proposals	4	5%
21-24 proposals	3	3%
25 or more proposals	46	53%

Graph 1. Methodological design: main steps



Appendix. From concepts to variables: operationalization of independent variables

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS	
CONTEXT / POLITY FACTORS	
Organizational culture	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of participation department 	1 No 2 Yes 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of participatory plan 	1 No 2 Yes 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Density (number of participatory experiences) 	1 1 experience 2 2 experiences 3 3 experiences 4 4 experiences 5 5 experiences 6 6 or more 9 No information
Timing	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to elections 	1 Less than one year 2 Between one and two years 3 More than two years
Ideology	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major party at the moment of the experience 	1 Left (IU) 2 Social-democrats (PSOE) 3 Center and other (PA, independents) 4 Right (PP) 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity at the political level 	1 Complete continuity (same party/coalition) 2 Partial continuity (most important party in government remains) 3 Clear government change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government stability / strength (majority, coalition, minority) 	1 Single-party majority government 2 Coalition government 3 Minority government
Resources available	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income per capita 	Numeric
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External funding for implementation 	1 No 2 Yes 9 No information
Size of municipality	Coding

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabitants 	1 Less than 5.000 2 5.000-10.000 3 10.001-20.000 4 20.001-50.000 5 More than 50.000	
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS		
PROCESS DESIGN		
Link to policy making	Coding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy stage of application 	Diagnosis Programming Decision Implementation Evaluation	0 No 1 Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of stages (0-5) 	0 No info 1 1 stage 2 2 stages 3 3 stages 4 4 stages 5 5 stages	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process design (PB, Strategic planning, other permanent, other temporary) 	1 Participatory Budgeting 2 Strategic planning 3 Other permanent mechanism 4 Other temporary experiences	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement of local authority to respond 	1 Compulsory 2 Recommendation 3 No obligation at all 4 Not specified	
Organized in co-operation	Coding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative of the process 	0 Also civil society 1 Just public administration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Public Administrations involved 	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External financial help 	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information	
Visibility	Coding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusion of participatory process on the part of public authorities 	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusion Media 	Radio Local press Local TV Letters Posters	0 No 1 Yes

	Info associations Web local govern. Mails, social net Loudspeakers Others	
• Policy proposal impact on media	0 Not present 1 Slightly present 2 Intensely present 9 No information	
• Temporal character	1 One-off experience 2 Long but limited in time 3 Stable mechanism 9 No information	
• Number of years working	Numeric	
Participation or deliberation oriented	Coding	
• Number of participants	0 0 1 10 or less 2 11-24 3 25-49 4 50-99 5 100-299 6 300-499 7 500-1000 8 More than 1000 99 No information	
• Presence of facilitator	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information	
• Presence of experts	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information	
• Level of information	1 Low 2 Medium 3 High 9 No information	
Types of participants	Coding	
• Participation of associations	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information	
• Criteria for including citizens in participation experience	1 Open to everyone 2 At random 3 Invitation 4 Mixed 9 No information	

POLICY RELATED FACTORS	
CONTENT OF PROPOSALS	
Nature of proposals	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Proposal Nature 	0 Generic 1 Implementable 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Proposal Description 	String variable
Policy proposal continuity character	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy proposal continuity character 	0 Does not challenge existing policies and practices 1 Challenges existing policies and practices 9 No information
Boundaries of political competence	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy proposal subject 	Codes COFOG, 1999 (four digits)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundaries of political competence 	1 Complete municipal competence 2 Partial municipal competence 3 No municipal competence 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of departments concerned by Proposal 	1 1 department 2 2 departments 3 3 departments 4 More than 3 departments 9 No information
POLICY RELATED FACTORS	
DEGREE OF SUPPORT	
Internal support (participants)	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support in the participation process 	0 No prioritization 1 Prioritized proposal 2 No prioritized proposal 9 No information
Internal support (public authority)	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians agreement with POLP implementation 	1 Totally agree 2 Tend to agree 3 Tend to disagree 4 Totally disagree 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technicians agreement with POLP implementation 	1 Totally agree 2 Tend to agree 3 Tend to disagree 4 Totally disagree 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears in mayor's party platform 	1 Proposal appeared in government

	party platform 2 Proposal did not appeared in party platform 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost / Budget planned for POLP implementation 	Exact cost (numeric) ____ Ball park evaluation 0 No cost 1 Low 2 Intermediate 3 High 9 No information
External support	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader external support 	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External support source 	1 Political Parties 2 Expert committees 3 Lobbies 4 Associations 5 Others 9 No information
Opposition	Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition to POLP implementation 	0 No 1 Yes 9 No information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition source 	1 Political Parties 2 Expert committees 3 Lobbies 4 Associations 5 Others 9 No information

Figure 1. From policy proposals to policy outcomes

